

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

Miles City Field Office
111 Garryown Road
Miles City, Montana 59301-0940

Finding of No Significant Impact

**WILDHORSE HAZARD FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT
DOI-BLM-MT-020-2009-0119-EA**

BACKGROUND

- The origin of the environmental assessment was due to a request from a Rosebud and Custer Counties Wildfire Protection Plans for reducing hazardous fuels and restoring fire adapted ecosystems.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

On the basis of the information contained in the EA (DOI-BLM-MT-020-2009-0119-EA) and all other information available to me, it is my determination that:

- (1) The implementation of the Proposed Action or alternatives will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in Record of Decision for the Powder River Resource Management Plan, as amended by the Fire/Fuels Management Plan Environmental Assessment/Plan Amendment for Montana and the Dakotas.
- (2) The Proposed Action is in conformance with the Record of Decision for the Powder River Resource Management Plan as amended; and
- (3) The Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment.

Therefore, an environmental impact statement or a supplement to the existing environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR '1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts described in the EA.

Context

The proposed action would occur south of the Yellowstone River, west of the Moon Creek road, east of the Rosebud Creek road and north of the Snyder Creek road (Township 2 North to Township 6 North and from Range 42 East to Range 45 East) designated as available for broad levels of fuels treatment including prescribed burns, mechanical (including manual and) and chemical methods in the Powder River RMP, as amended. The RMP, anticipated that prescribed burns, mechanical (including manual) and chemical methods, would occur to maintain or improve ecosystem health. The proposed action is in accordance with the Powder River RMP.

Under the Proposed Action, Objectives of the treatments would include:

- Decreasing the risk of wildfire to public and firefighter safety as well as the risk of loss of structures, crops, property, and resources due to fire by reducing the amount and continuity of stands of conifers and other woody species.
- Maintaining the reduced level of risk and natural fuel loads through follow-up treatments.
- Increasing the health, vigor, and productivity of the native plant community through the reduction of conifers and corresponding increase in availability of water and nutrients.
- Improving forest health by reducing the number of trees of various age classes.
- Protecting existing identified important wildlife habitat (big game winter range, grouse leks, etc) through the reduction in flammability of vegetation, the increase in “edge”, and increase in availability of sunlight, nutrients, and water resulting from the treatments. Increase wildlife management options to achieve desired/identified habitat characteristics for special status and economically important species.
- Achieve a more open, fire resilient stand by returning densities of woody vegetation to conditions within the known range of historical variability [Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) Reference Conditions: Potential Natural Vegetation Group (PNVG): Ponderosa Pine].
- Avoid or mitigate adverse impact to the environment and activities which currently occur while implementing fuels treatments.

Intensity

In making this determination, I considered the following factors:

1. The activities described in the proposed action do not include any significant beneficial or adverse impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(1)). The EA includes a description of the expected environmental consequences of the proposed hazard fuels reduction project.
2. The proposed activities would not significantly affect any unique characteristics (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3)) of the geographic area such as prime and unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, designated wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, or areas of critical concern. The project area for the proposed fuels reduction projects does not contain any of the unique characteristics listed.
3. The activities described in the proposed action do not involve effects on the human environment that are likely to be highly controversial (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)). Many similar fuels reduction projects have been implemented in the Miles City Field Office and the effects of those treatments, though not significant, are well understood.
4. The activities described in the proposed action do not involve effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)). Similar fuels reduction projects, previously approved by BLM, have not resulted in effects that are highly uncertain or have involved unknown risks.
5. The activities included in the proposed action would not significantly affect public health or safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2)). Similar fuels treatment activities in the area, eastern Montana, have not significantly affected public health or safety.
6. My decision to implement these activities does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)). Each fuels treatment project submitted to this office is individually analyzed for conformance with existing Land Use Plans and individually assessed for environmental impacts.

7. The effects of the proposed fuels treatment projects would not be significant, individually or cumulatively, when considered with the effects of other actions (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)). The EA discloses that there are no other connected or cumulative actions that would cause significant cumulative impacts. The design features in the EA addresses BLM requirements upon approval that would mitigate: 1) impacts to raptors, the sharp-tailed grouse, and sage grouse; 2) impacts to cultural, historical, or archaeological resource or vertebrate paleontological resources if identified in the project area; and 3) infestation of non-native invasive noxious weeds in the project area.

8. I have determined that the activities described in the proposed action will not adversely affect or cause loss or destruction of scientific, cultural, or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)).

9. The proposed activities are not likely to adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act (40 CFR 1508.27(b) (9)). Chapter 3 of the EA contains a list the listed BLM sensitive, federally protected and state sensitive species potentially present within the general proposed project area.

10. The proposed activities will not threaten any violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)).

APPROVED

**Field Manager,
Miles City Field Office**

Date